

ECOTOURISM AND LOCAL PERCEPTION ABOUT ITS IMPACTS

A STUDY OF VILLAGE SAM, JAISALMER, RAJASTHAN

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ABSTRACT

Over the past three decades Jaisalmer of Rajasthan has experienced a remarkable growth in number of tourists, both overseas and domestic tourists increased more than 30 percent between 1981 and 2011. Village Sam located in the western part of state in Jaisalmer district is the main eco tourist's attraction. Camel desert safaris have become a great attraction for foreign tourists who find the experience both full of adventure and exotic. It is estimated that such trend may have a significant impact upon local communities in Rajasthan tourist regions. This study attempts to identify the perception about impacts of tourism among the local community. The study is based on a survey of 100 local resident's perception about impact of tourism; it was assessed by a 15-item tourism impact scale which measures both belief and attitude toward the affecting attributes- economic, social, cultural and environmental factors.

KEYWORDS: Eco Tourism, Tourist Destination, Local Perception, Camel Safari, Impacts of Tourism

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades there are new trends of tourism like rural tourism, medical tourism eco tourism etc. Village Sam, Jaisalmer located in the western part of India, is fast emerging as eco tourist attraction. This tourist destination attracts most of the tourists visiting Rajasthan. Camel safari and shifting sand dunes are main attraction of tourists. The Camel Safari near Jaisalmer is now one of Asia's best adventure eco tourism spot. This is a popular and great way to see the, visiting villages, seeing wildlife, and riding across the open desert sands and to enjoy an adventurous holiday. This include camel treks, ranging from short rides around Jaisalmer to extensive trips that remind you of journey across the Sahara, The camel safari circuit in India comprises of Jaisalmer, Jodhpur and Bikaner, all in Rajasthan, but typical camel safaris are mainly organized around Jaisalmer. Village Sam sand dunes are world famous for this safari and its camps. Night halts of safaris are in villages on the way or temporary bivouac camps.

Village Sam may not have great expanses of sand dunes and incredible spaces of wilderness as large as those of the Sahara, but it more than makes up with some glorious citadels and extremely colorful and quaint villages. Its sand dunes are more easily accessible from airports and railway stations than those of many African countries.

CONCEPTIONAL VIEW OF ECOTOURISM

Tourism that combines local economic development, protection of the quality of the environment and promotion of the natural advantages and the history of an area is called eco tourism. The eco- tourism could contribute significantly to the development of any area.

Ecotourism is travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and (often) small

scale. It helps educate the traveler; provides funds for conservation; directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities; and fosters respect for different cultures and human rights.

Martha Honey Ecotourism and Sustainable Development, Second Edition: Who Owns Paradise?

Environmentally responsible travel to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and accompanying cultural features, both past and present) that promote conservation, have a low visitor impact and provide for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local peoples.

(International Union for Conservation of Nature)

Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the life of local people.

(International Ecotourism Society)

Principal of eco tourism

Minimize the impact of visiting the location

- Build respect and awareness for the environment and cultural practices
- Ensure that the tourism provides positive experiences for both the visitors and the hosts
- Provide direct financial aid for conservation
- Provide financial aid, empowerment and other benefits for local peoples
- Raise the traveler's awareness of the host country's political, environmental and social climate.

(International Ecotourism Society)

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

The main objective of this study is to know the trends of ecotourism in the village Sam, Jaisalmer and to assess the local perception about its impacts. Data sources of this study are both primary and secondary.

METHODOLOGY

In this research ecotourism in study area and local perceptions about its impacts are presented. A questionnaire was designed for this research and various related literature was used to develop the items of the questionnaire. 100 adult members of the household were approached. Data are gathered in December 2011, which is a high tourist season in the village. Most of the questions were based on a 5 point Likert scale, ranging from 1: 'strongly disagree' to 5: 'strongly agree' and the questionnaire was pilot tested. Means and standard deviations are the descriptive statistics used in discussing the distribution of responses gathered in the research. T-test was used to determine whether there were significant differences between respondents' group mean totals and item mean scores. The questionnaires were distributed among the local people, living or working in village Sam (Jaisalmer) besides the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with residents were also conducted.

STUDY AREA

Village Sam of district Jaisalmer of Rajasthan is located at a distance of 42 kilometer from Jaisalmer. The area is

barren, undulating with its famous sand dunes and slopes towards the Indus valley and the Runn of Kutch. The area is located in the eco friendly and peaceful environment. Camel safari and shifting sand dunes are main attraction of tourists. During camel safari local tribes of area serve the tourists traditional meals, local dance, music and local songs are arranged to entertain the tourist.



Figure 1

Map: Study Area Sam, Jaisalmer, Rajasthan

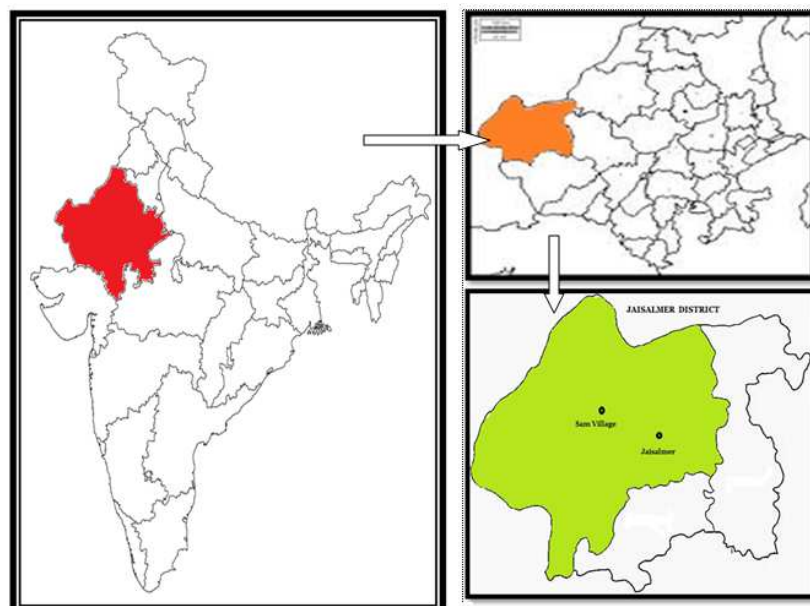


Figure 2

DISCUSSIONS

The chief lure of the tourist lie in desert ecology in Jaisalmer. However historical and cultural heritage are also the

tourist attraction. It is third most popular tourist attraction of Rajasthan. Since 1981 tourists arrival in Jaisalmer both domestic and foreign are increasing. In 2011 growth rate of domestic and foreign tourists were 10.54% and 15.21% respectively

Table 1: Domestic and Foreign Tourist Arrival in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan (1981-2011)

Year	Domestic Tourist	Foreign Tourist	Total Tourist
1981	65908	7413	73321
1991	104610	38103	142713
2001	103109	46107	153233
2011	281159	122969	404128

Source: Tourism Department, Govt. of Rajasthan, Jaipure

The increasing numbers of tourists also brought its consequences; it may be positive and negative. Local perception about these consequences is analyzed as follows.

Table 2: Local Perceptions toward Impacts of Tourism

Factor	N	Mean	S D	Rank
Economic				
1 Infrastructure improvements in the area.				
2 Employment generation for local people.	100	4.38	0.65	03
3 Increased the prices of goods in the area	100	4.57	0.61	01
4 Improved the living standard of local residents	100	3.80	0.71	08
5 Increased per capital income of local residents	100	4.32	0.66	04
6 Seasonal character of tourism creates high-risk for Employment.	100	3.91	0.84	06
	100	4.52	0.55	02
Social and Cultural				
1 Loss of indigenous identity and values.				
2 Changes in traditional culture	100	2.46	1.06	10
3 Provides opportunities to learn other people and culture	100	2.43	1.13	11
4 Local residents adapted to tourist demand.	100	4.09	0.71	05
5 Crime generation due to tourism in the area.	100	3.49	1.04	09
6 Ethnic songs and dances are changed	100	2.50	1.02	12
	100	3.87	0.86	08
Environmental				
1 Affects the quality of natural environment of area				
2 Affects the flora and fauna of the area	100	1.85	0.83	14
3 Increased pressure on local resources	100	1.87	0.80	13
	100	1.80	0.75	15

Scale: 5=Strongly Agree 4=Agree 3=Neutral 2=Disagree 1= Strongly Disagree

RESEARCH FINDING

To analysis the local perception about impacts of ecotourism in village Sam the 15 items of the economic, socio-cultural and environmental factors are analyzed and discussed, results are as follows

Economic Factor

The result reveals that tourism has both positive economic benefits as well as negative impact on village Sam. On the positive side, tourism has created jobs for the local people and provides income for local community. However, the jobs created are seasonal in nature; Table 2. shows perception towards items associated with economic factor have the highest scores. The most favored economic items are as follows: tourism increased employment in the area (Mean=4.57), tourism improved quality of infrastructure in the area (Mean=4.38), improved the quality of life of local residents (Mean

=4.32) Negative perception about economic factor is that it is a seasonal tourism that creates high risk for employment (Mean=4.52)

Tourism is the major source of income for village Sam and much of its development is owed to the tourism activity

Socio-cultural Factor

Tourism is a very effective agent of change in the lifestyle of the host communities. Tourism changes the value system, lifestyle and behavior of host community; it can transform a close society to an open society. In 2011 about 404128 tourists from different culture come in study area, their socio-cultural traits are different from of the host communities. Thus, interaction between differing cultures can result in either positive or negative impact. Table 2 show no significant impact of tourism on host community. Provides opportunities to learn other people and culture (Mean=4.09) change in life style (Mean=3.49), are positive impacts. However, there are some negative impacts of tourism like increased crime rate in the area (Mean=2.50), loss of ingenious identity and values and increase of crime rate in the study area.

Environmental Factor

A big size of tourists is visiting in the study area in every year since 1981 and it can affect the quality of local environment. But our finding reveals that this factor is least favorable, local community perception about impact of eco- tourism on environment is positive. Findings in table 2 are as follows: affects the quality of natural environment of area (Mean =1.85) increased pressure on local resources (Mean=1.80) affects the flora and fauna of the area (Mean=1.87).

CONCLUSIONS

Sam village of Jaisalmer is emerging as an ecotourism spot in Rajasthan. Camel desert safari is the main attraction for foreign tourists. During the camel safari tourists can enjoy beautiful ecosystem of desert. This form of tourism provides income to local residents, tour operators and camel owners in Jaisalmer district. In present study local perception about impacts of eco tourism has been analyzed through a 15 items tourism impacts scale. The study found local perception is positive in aspect of economic benefits. Tourism has improved the life standard of local community and also improved the infrastructure in the area. The study also evaluates the socio – culture impact positive. However some residents are concern about some undesirable impacts of eco tourism in study area. Impacts on environment are found least favorable.

The study reveals that ecotourism in Sam village of Jaisalmer is beneficiary for local community. There are no serious negative impacts on culture and environment.

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